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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001784

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TAGS: PGOV PREL TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: OPPOSITION PARTIES PLAYING TO TEN: MHP, GP, DP

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice Weiner for reasons 1.4(b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and comment. The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Youth Party (GP), and Democrat Party (DP) -- all significantly weaker than the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) -- are scrambling to garner votes in the July 22 general elections to make it across Turkey's high ten percent threshold and secure seats (and privileges) in the new parliament. GP and MHP seek to electrify voters by attacking AKP while showcasing a tempting, if expensive, array of social programs. DP has put together a more moderate platform, intended to lure center-right votes from AKP and provide a harmonious alternative to its confrontational competitors. DP has failed, however, to regain voters' confidence after its rocky start as a collapsed merger of the True Path Party (DYP) and Motherland Party (Anavatan) and appears unlikely to capture the necessary ten percent. GP's blatant populist promises, outlandish to many, are shrewdly attractive to an array of disaffected voters that may add up to the magic ten percent. Of teh three, MHP, with its devoted political base and ultranationalist ideology, appears to be the betters' favorite to cross the threshold and seal a place in Turkey's next parliament. End summary and comment.

MHP: TOUGH TIMES CALL FOR FANATICAL NATIONALISM

¶2. (C) MHP's platform plays to many voters' resentment over AKP's religious and democratic reforms, fear of terrorism, and anger at the U.S. and EU for influencing Turkish policies. MHP promises dogged pursuit of Turkey's national interests and an end to AKP's truckling approach to the EU--especially on internal matters--while achieving little in return. If the EU does not agree to accept Turkey as a full member, MHP vows to end accession negotiations altogether and withdraw from the customs union, which Turkey joined in 1996. Current mistrust between the US and Turkey should be overcome, with a common goal of developing a genuine, multifaceted strategic partnership that serves mutual interests.

¶3. (C) On terrorism, MHP policies border on extremist, with hard-core rhetoric designed to energize the electorate. In addition to strengthening the country's intelligence networks, the party vows to retaliate against the PKK by cutting resources to Turkey's Kurdish southeast and imposing embargos on food, water, and electricity. MHP's tactics

contrast sharply with AKP's pledge to continue infrastructural reforms that have helped the southeast integrate into Turkey's economy and society. MHP crowns its bluster-heavy terrorism policy with a promise to transfer PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan from his "private" Aegean island prison (which Turkish taxpayers resent having to pay for) to a violent criminals' prison where his reception will be hostile, if not lethal. On Iraq, MHP has repeatedly demanded a cross-border operation, and called for a "deterrence policy" supported by military force to keep the Kurdish Regional Government from harboring PKK terrorists. It considers the developments in Iraq a direct threat to Turkey's security and territorial integrity.

¶4. (C) On domestic issues, MHP slams AKP for praetorian privatizations, failing to address unemployment, and undermining the country's national unity. MHP proposes to provide 200 YTL per month to every family with an unemployed head of household, and low interest loans to entrepreneurs. Although its stance toward Islamic headscarves varies, prominent party members have endorsed the traditional Anatolian kerchief but have decried non-Turkish, full-cover "turbans". MHP also proposes to improve national unity by eliminating foreign language education from public schools and increasing the number of required civics classes to strengthen the sense of Turkish identity.

GENC (YOUTH) PARTY: TARGETING THE JESSE VENTURA VOTE

¶5. (C) The Genc Party's platform is weak (to the point of incoherence) on substance and strong on populist promises. The party dispenses gifts at extravagant campaign rallies and relies on the personal popularity of its leadership pantheon.

ANKARA 00001784 002 OF 002

Cem Uzan -- a former businessman tainted by his family's multi-million dollar bilking of US and Turkish companies -- heads the party and pumps up support with charisma, shocking pronouncements, unrealistic promises and an underdog's appeal. Uzan joined forces with other big-name, big-personality Turks, including Ibrahim Tatlıses, a popular folk singer/gangster, accused of involvement in matricide.

¶6. (C) On foreign policy, Genc proposes to continue EU accession negotiations -- even offering to settle for some kind of special arrangement -- but to end them if relations continue to deteriorate. Genc pledges to reject IMF austerity programs and take a harder line on Cyprus. The party has repeatedly endorsed an immediate cross-border operation into Northern Iraq and vows to support the Turkish military domestically and internationally in the fight against terrorism. Like MHP, Genc accuses AKP of formulating policy in consultation with the increasingly unpopular EU and US rather than based on Turkey's national interests. Genc offers its most flamboyant promises on domestic issues: a one-time transfer payment of 350YTL to all unemployed Turkish workers (officially, 11 percent of Turkey's 73 million people are unemployed), abolition of the university entrance exams, and a reduction in gas prices to 1 YTL/liter. While many suggest GP leaders are most interested in parliamentary privileges and immunities, the party's populist rhetoric and dark horse role are strategically targeted to appeal to disaffected voters looking for an alternative.

DEMOCRAT PARTY: RESPECTABLE BUT GOING NOWHERE

¶7. (C) DP's prospects are weak, despite a respectable, often forward-leaning, agenda. DP (the former DYP) has failed to recover from a badly mismanaged merger between DYP and Anavatan in May that was meant to unify the center-right and provide a harmonious alternative in today's polarized political line-up. DP has put together a broad platform -- sometimes downright enlightened -- largely uninfected by populist promises. DP proposes to reform Turkey's

military-drafted constitution, strengthen judicial independence, augment intellectual property protection, increase the compulsory education requirement to 12 years, allow university students to wear whatever they want (including now-prohibited Islamic headscarves), improve foreign language instruction, and lower taxes to reduce unemployment. Internationally, the party proposes greater economic integration with Turkey's neighbors -- including Armenia and Iraq, an international treaty guaranteeing Iraq's territorial integrity, and renewed efforts to join the EU. Although it vows to pursue terrorists wherever they go, DP's support for a cross-border operation into Northern Iraq is lukewarm at best. The party calls for a better strategy for dealing with different power groups in Washington (State, Pentagon, Congress) and increased coordination and cooperation with the US to improve bilateral relations.

¶8. (C) The few populist proposals included in the platform include promises to reduce gas prices, stick it to the IMF, and allow senior citizens to use spas and thermal centers at reduced prices. Had DP managed to regain its footing after the botched merger, it might have been a center-right contender and given AKP some real competition. Instead, many supporters doubt the party can surmount the ten percent threshold and view a vote for DP as a wasted ballot this time around.

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